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ABSTRACT

Communication and language arts are central in any consideration of the essential learning skills. This paper focuses on communication skills for fifth and sixth graders, particularly the language skills of speaking, reading, and writing for which schools assume major responsibility. The integral relationship between language abilities and critical thinking/study skills (skills crucial for fifth and sixth graders) is explored in some detail. The paper has two major aims: to present pertinent overviews of the literature and to discuss what is usually taught, and how it is taught, in each of the major language art areas; and to make specific recommendations about how The Essential Learning Skills Television Project can contribute to a discovery approach for teaching communication skills. (Author/VT)

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Background Paper

Communication, Fifth and Sixth Graders, and The Essential Learning Skills Television Project

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

by
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The Essential Learning Skills Television Project is a cooperative activity of state and provincial agencies, designed to strengthen learning skills instruction in American and Canadian elementary schools. It had its origin in a 1973-74 series of meetings of educators and educational broadcasters in the United States and Canada.

Organized and managed by the Agency for Instructional Television, the project is financed largely by the participating states and provinces. Exxon Corporation is supporting initial informational activities; the Corporation for Public Broadcasting has reserved funds to assist production.

The project undertakes to develop television and related printed materials that will enhance the teaching of communication skills, mathematics skills, and reasoning and study skills. This publication is one in a series of background papers prepared to help in the conceptualization of materials for the project.

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Communication, Fifth and Sixth Graders, and The Essential Learning Skills Television Project

Abstract

Communication and language arts are central in any consideration of the essential learning skills. This paper focuses on communication skills for fifth and sixth graders, particularly the language skills of speaking, reading, and writing for which schools assume major responsibility. The integral relationship between language abilities and critical thinking/study skills (skills crucial for fifth and sixth graders) is explored in some detail.

The paper has two major aims. The first is to present pertinent overviews of the literature and to discuss what is usually taught, and how it is taught, in each of the major language arts areas. The second is to make specific recommendations about how The Essential Learning Skills Television Project can contribute to a discovery approach for teaching communication skills.

Introduction

An educational paradox today is the fact "that we know more about learning and more about teaching than at any time in the past, while we seem to agree less than ever before on what should be learned and what should be taught in our schools" (Drake, 1976, p. 197). "Back to the basics!" is a common cry that has generated interest and concern for the teaching of essential skills. Although the essential skills are difficult to define, the communication/language arts skills should certainly be included.

This paper will review the literature and discuss the communication skills and ways they are taught. The elementary schools have been charged with failure to produce students skilled in the communication areas, perhaps because of the traditional curriculum and instructional approaches. The curriculum approach of focusing on separate subjects and isolated skills teaching rather than on the processes of communication (sending and receiving) has resulted in students who have not developed effective strategies for communicating a message. Then there is the instructional method of presenting English and other language arts:

> the authoritarian approach to learning—memorization, rote learning, drill—deductive techniques. Research is indicating that students can learn more effectively by creative methods—questioning, experimenting, exploring, discovery—inductive methods. Studies in science and mathematics have led the way toward the use of inquiry and discovery methods. (Iris & Sidney Tiedt, 1967, p. 78)

This paper will describe a discovery approach to the communication skills through the medium of instructional television. Considered will be the tremendous impact that television has on children in terms of motivation, interests, and experiences. However, the main components or objectives of the suggested television series will be based on the following rather simple, but important, statement by

Moffett (1973): "If the goals of the curriculum are to help learners think, speak, listen, read, and write to the limit of their capacities, then the most reasonable premise is that they should do exactly those things" (p. 32).

Communication

The human communication system is remarkable. It must be learned, but then what power! The ability to leap space and time barriers, relive the past and forecast the future, exchange thoughts and feelings (Barnett, 1964).

A world-wide communication system may preserve peace among peoples and countries. For our individual youth, the communication skills may be survival skills in our world of work and our complex, democratic society.

Young children are bombarded with communication stimuli—pictures, signs, colors, shapes, sounds, and words. Meanings develop as children see, listen, do, speak, and think (Lee, Bingham, & Woelfel, 1968). Research by Piaget and others reveals that young children are rather sophisticated language users and producers, that "children have internalized most linguistic rules of their language before they come to school"(Rosen, 1974, p. 14). Input from television, radio, and contact with people stimulates and motivates the child to respond—to communicate.

When children near school age they are highly motivated and interested, ideally suited for learning communication skills. But something happens during the school years. Accusations fly that the schools and teachers aren't doing their job; children aren't learning to read and write as they should. The National Assessment Test results are disappointing, and college entrance test scores drop lower each year. Children seem to see little relationship between the real world and what goes on at school.

What do we change and how should we do it? We must remember that the goal of communication is the transfer of meaning, not transfer of isolated ideas, facts, or products. Smith, Goodman, and Meredith (1976) state, "Communication is a two-way process of output and input, of speaking and listening, of writing and reading, of presenting and receiving" (p. 207).

Lefevre (1970) describes a four-part model that is applicable to all communication situations: sender, receiver, message (what is communicated), and channel. The channels of communication are varied and numerous, including drawing and painting, film and television, sculpture, dance, music, symbols of mathematics, drama, and language. We will take a close look at one of the channels for which the school assumes major responsibility, the development of language.

Language

Language was devised by man and is characteristic of man. It is

symbolic and patterned, a vital part of human existence and the expression of human thought. Language is personal, social, active, and functional. The child learns language because of the need to communicate. Then language makes it possible for a child to report, explain, describe, discuss, question, debate, socialize, converse, express, persuade, and evaluate—to convey thoughts, feelings, and personality in oral and written form.

Language is the dominant factor in the human learning process and cannot be separated from thinking. The development of language parallels the development of cognitive skills. The child moves from naming and labeling to perception and concept development and then to the higher level of reasoning—the manipulation of concepts.

Language is the medium of instruction, the main vehicle for teaching thinking and reasoning and all subject matter disciplines. It is also the tool of the child striving to get meaning from the world. Language is expanded by this striving, and the more chances children have to use language, the greater their language development. A language community should be created in the classroom with maximum opportunities for language production through speaking and writing. How should language be taught? Lefevre (1970) says:

> The student's language learning in school should parallel his early childhood method of learning to speak his native tongue—playfully, through delighted experiences of discovery—through repeated exposure to language forms and patterns, by creative imitation and manipulation, and by personal trial and error. (p. 75)

An instructional television series can contribute to language learning by providing discovery experiences and opportunities for viewers to be active receivers and producers of language. These are essential educational tasks. Moffett (1973) says, "Rendering experience into words is the real business of schools. . . . It takes all of 13 years just to get off to a good start the lifelong learning of how to produce and receive language well" (p. 11).

A discussion of the ways of producing and receiving language follows.

Speaking

Oral language ability is an essential communication skill. We speak more than we read and write. Consider what percentage of your day is spent talking (Lucroy & Caulfield, Note 1). Oral language development is first and fundamental; Buckley (1976) states that, "Well developed oral language is the undeniable prerequisite for effective reading and writing" (p. 623).

Thinking and oral language are interdependent. Smith, Goodman, and Meredith (1976) say, "The student will have nothing of significance to write down or communicate, nor will he understand

sophisticated reading unless his *speech-thought* is constantly nurtured" (p. 209). They suggest that strategies for teaching communication should emphasize the transposing of speech-thought into written language and back again.

Oral language development is neglected for several reasons. Students in traditional classrooms are often passive and silent because the teacher acts as lecturer. Buckley (1976) says, "No other single action has retarded students' language more than the posture of teacher as lecturer" (p. 623). In addition, some teachers are too textbook-oriented; because there are few oral language textbooks, the subject receives little emphasis, even though every subject area should include time for oral language development. Finally, there may be few speaking opportunities in a classroom because of discipline. Some teachers believe that the key to control is to keep children overoccupied, at their desks, busy with books and papers. These teachers feel threatened if they don't have almost absolute silence in the room (Baird & Johnson, Note 3). This "gag act" is unnecessary and unwise.

Children learn to express themselves orally by listening and speaking; the elementary school classroom is the place to surround the child in a language bath—a rich and varied oral language environment. The need for oral language skill will probably increase in the future as the use of media increases. Wood (1976) says, "One need only consider the many and varied uses for oral language today (radio, television, and tape recordings are samples) in order to realize that oral communication continues to be highly important in our present society" (p. 617).

Right or wrong, people are often judged by not only what they say but by how they say it. Children come to school speaking different dialects, the speech of their family and community environments. For some time authorities debated whether or not a child's language should be "corrected' to bring all children to a certain speaking level of "standard English." Today most educators recognize various dialects as not deficient but different (Moffett, 1973). Smith, Goodman, and Meredith (1976) state:

> The only approach that may help any large number of divergent children is expansion; not the rejection of their mother tongue but expansion outward from the idiolect and subcultural dialect to the expanded language of the general culture, giving up what is no longer needed and adding to meet new needs. Teachers can be of enormous help in this process. (p. 56)

Teachers I spoke with (Anglin & Chapman, Note 2; Baird & Johnson, Note 3) accept language differences, yet they believe in exposing all children to "standard English." Otherwise, they say, schools are promoting a double standard and doing a disservice to children who will later live and compete for jobs in a society that expects or requires a certain kind of language.

An instructional television series should promote both acceptance *and* expansion of children's language—not by presenting different words, language forms, or usages as right or wrong, but various levels and forms of language in many different situations. The key is to show children that communication of meaning is important; in various situations, certain kinds of language will be most appropriate in communicating a message. For instance a segment might present three different ways to say something: slang, informal language, and formal language. Let members of the viewing audience decide which would be most appropriate or effective in conversation with their fathers, their friends, or the man who is interviewing kids for a newspaper route. This method can encourage children to observe their own and others' language, to become aware of choices in the almost infinite number of language variations, to see how they are using language and how they might use it.

Children learn to speak by speaking, and they learn speech patterns by hearing them. The television programs should give the viewers something to say and models of how to go about saying it. Oral language skills can be expanded as children watch and listen to the following speaking situations on the television screen and then duplicate them in the classroom: debates, oral reports, dramas, role-playing, sharing books, storytelling, choral speaking, recording audio tapes, interviews, puppet shows, political campaigning, selling scout or sports team cookies door-to-door, discussions with adults, etc. The different activities should help children develop language facility, increase vocabulary, learn to present ideas in an organized manner, anticipate questions, report, explain, describe, persuade, summarize, improve self-concepts, express feelings, become important members of a group, and develop poise and confidence.

Listening

The human ear is bombarded with messages from radio, television, and recording devices, yet most of us operate at only about 25 percent listening efficiency. Hearing is listening without specific response; auding or attending is listening with intent and comprehension (Iris & Sidney Tiedt, 1967). Effective listening is a skill that can be taught and developed.

As a child learns to listen, he/she becomes less egocentric, more able to relate to others. Becoming aware of listening for a purpose, children find out what they want to know, what others are going to do, and how to do something. Listening should not be just a taking-in; it should ignite a reaction, a change in feeling, understanding, or behavior (Lee, Bingham, & Woelfel, 1968).

Listening is an important part of the thinking process. Through listening activities compatible with television viewing situations, children can learn to make generalizations, sort ideas and accept or reject them, group into categories, observe similarities and differences, make comparisons, and develop concepts (Iris & Sidney

Tiedt, 1967). Listening skills may not be tested on achievement tests, but they are essential skills for fifth and sixth graders to develop.

Purposeful listening situations in an instructional television series can provide excellent opportunities to involve viewers. One of the faults of earlier instructional television series is that nothing was required from the viewer. Simmons, Shafer, and West (1976) state, "Research further indicates that a genuine communication situation must exist in order for a child to learn. That is, the child must participate actively in the act of communication. He cannot be merely a passive listener" (p. 12). Television listening situations could have a voice-over narrator give specific directions for particular purposes. For instance, "Listen carefully, then tell the names of the characters in the story you hear," or "A synonym is a word that is similar or close in meaning to another word; listen to this paragraph and write down all the synonyms for the word *talk*." Combination speaking and listening situations could be planned such as interviews on career education topics. Children enjoy being careful observers of spoken language when they have a purpose for listening.

Reading

There is probably more debate and concern about the teaching of reading than about any other subject. What is reading? Stauffer (1975) says, "Reading is a process, a dynamic, action-filled way of responding to printed symbols, and not a product or school subject" (p. 3). Authorities disagree about what is involved in the reading process. Henry (1976) views reading as concept development saying "that the act of reading is inextricably embedded in a thinking process, either in analysis or synthesis or in both of these processes combined" (p. 3). Stauffer (1975) agrees: "Reading must be taught as a thinking process. The act of reading involves all the skills in the art of discovery: perceptive keenness, functional memory, creative inquiry, logical reasoning, and critical evaluation" (p. xi).

On the other hand, Moffett (1973) sees reading as strictly a decoding process. He does not equate thinking skills and reading. He says, "In brief, I question the whole concept of 'reading skills' beyond the level of word recognition" (p. 17). Moffett, of course, recognizes that there are higher level cognitive skills; he just doesn't call them reading skills. The disagreement is not so much in what the skills are, but in terminology—reading or thinking skills. In this paper I will call them reading skills, as Henry and Stauffer suggest, for one important reason. Every fifth and sixth grade curriculum recognizes the subject area of reading and provides a time period for it. Unfortunately, most schools do not provide a "thinking period." If these skills are called reading skills they stand a better chance of being recognized, emphasized, and taught. (Other aspects of this matter will be discussed in the "Critical Thinking" section of the paper.)

Why does reading receive such emphasis in the elementary school curriculum? Guszak (1972) says the goal is self-directed learning, "to enable the child to teach himself" (p. 228). Robinson (1974) feels that reading instruction can help the learner acquire a system of strategies for discovering and utilizing meaning. Even with the media explosion, "reading remains a key factor in learning and communicating, in solving problems and forming new concepts, in gathering knowledge for future careers, in seeking recreational enjoyment" (Goldbecker, 1975, p. 15). The reading process is connected to other language arts skills and content subjects. Henry (1974) says, "Reading is inextricably tied up with both oral and written composition, with experience, with other concepts inside us, and with other reading" (p. 17).

How should reading be taught? Most authorities recommend a spiral curriculum for development of reading ability. Smith, Goodman, and Meredith (1976) say, "Every curriculum must proceed along some lines of sequence, such as simple to complex, near to far, then to now" (p. 287). Instruction must begin where each child is on this spiral. Piaget's research shows that the right direction is from concrete examples to abstract ideas and that sequentially ordered step-by-step treatment of material helps children progress from literal reading to inferential and evaluative reading (Bryant, 1974).

The great debate revolves around which method of reading instruction to use: basal approach, phonics, linguistics, language experience, ITA, individualized reading, concept development, programmed instruction, multimedia, or a combination. All of these methods have proponents, but it appears that no one method is best for all pupils (Goldbecker, 1975). Some children process information better through one modality than another: auditory, visual, or kinesthetic (Bryant, 1974). The method of instruction should depend on the learning styles of individual pupils and the teaching style of the teacher. Whatever method is used, reading should be thought of and taught as a communication process, with meaning being the prime objective.

Before discussing the content for a fifth- and sixth-grade reading program, we should consider what children are exposed to in earlier grades. The main emphasis in primary grades is on decoding, the process of unlocking or decoding the visual, alphabetic symbols (letters) into words. Decoding skills, also called basic word recognition or word attack skills include: context analysis, sight words, phonetic analysis, structural analysis, and dictionary analysis (Guszak, 1972).

By the end of the fourth grade, most children will have been exposed to the following:

Context Analysis: strategies for getting clues from surrounding words

Sight Words: The Dolch list of 220 basic sight words

Phonetic Analysis: single-consonant substitution; consonant blends and digraphs; initial, final, and silent consonants; short, long, and silent vowels; vowel digraphs; diphthongs; and phonograms

Structural Analysis: roots, compounds, contractions, inflectional endings, prefixes, suffixes, and syllabication

Dictionary Analysis: using the dictionary pronunciation key to sound out unknown words.

Children are unique, like fingerprints, and beginning fifth graders will vary greatly in their mastery of the word recognition skills. It bothers me and a lot of other people that there will be many, many students in the fifth and sixth grades who will not have mastered these basic decoding skills. However, I do not think the instructional television series for the fifth- and sixth-grade levels should get into word recognition for three reasons:

1. The Essential Learning Skills Television Project should not be a remedial reading series.
2. Teaching word recognition skills would not leave enough time to cover the other reading skills for the fifth- and sixth-grade levels.
3. Until 1980 at least, the Children's Television Workshop will be repeating the best 260 "Electric Company" shows, with 130 shows a year. "Electric Company" teaches word attack skills in ways that would be hard to beat. Why duplicate a good thing?

What reading skills should the series be concerned with if not word recognition? The teachers I talked with said that if the project can accomplish only one thing, let it be the teaching of comprehension skills (functional reading). I agree. To most authorities simple word calling is not reading. Smith, Goodman, and Meredith (1976) say, "Reading is not reading unless it involves some level of comprehension" (p. 269). Comprehension receives the greatest emphasis in intermediate grades as students encounter increasingly complex assignments in subject matter textbooks. Reading to learn begins to replace learning to read (Guszak, 1972).

In recent years, national standardized reading test results have improved for primary grades, but have dropped at the fourth grade level and up in many states. Everyone is asking *why*. In her keynote address to the 20th annual convention of the International Reading Association, Jeanne Chall (Note 4) addressed this question:

> There may be some validity in considering that our knowledge and technology for the teaching of reading in the middle grades and higher is much behind that for beginning reading. We know less about comprehension than about decoding. Also, most teachers will tell us that it is harder to teach reading in the middle and higher grades than in the primary grades.

When the emphasis is placed on developmental skills in reading in the content fields, there are many challenges: motivation, experiential background, technical vocabulary, organizational patterns, special skills such as map reading, and various readability levels (Dulin, 1974). Teaching must be different because of the differences in the subject areas of English, mathematics, science, and social studies. And instead of a single text in each subject, children are expected to read and interpret many print materials. (Comprehension skills will be more fully discussed in the next section, "Critical Thinking.")

Fluency skills become important in the intermediate grades as children tackle different kinds of reading materials. Stauffer (1975) describes the fluent reader as versatile, "one who adjusts his rate of reading according to his purpose for reading and the nature and complexity of the material" (p. 356). Students can be taught how to adjust their rate of reading. The four categories are skimming, scanning, survey reading, and study reading.

The kind and quality of reading materials chosen for an intermediate grade child are very important, whether fiction or nonfiction. Materials must be *worth* reading—real language with a real story or message interesting to children within their realm of experience (Smith, Goodman, & Meredith, 1976).

I do not think that there will be time to emphasize literature in the instructional television series, but I would like to see a few programs present fine children's literature to help cultivate the delight, joys, and pleasures of reading a good book. It will be a great service if the project can impart a little bit of that "love for reading" that seems to be missing in many children today. Literature communications thoughts and feelings and experiences, opening the child's window to the world.

These on-screen literature lessons should lead to all kinds of communication activities: discussions, creative writing, imaginative role-playing, puppetry, dramatization, and storytelling. Henry (1974) says, "Reading education today too seldom fosters creative responses to the text" (p. 116). That can be changed with The Essential Learning Skills Television Project.

In summary, I recommend that the instructional television series deal with two types of reading: functional and recreational. I suggest that in whatever you do with reading, consider interests of the children. Remember that they read scout handbooks and magazines and advertisements as well as social studies and science and literature. Reading should be an active search for meaning; the goal is to motivate children to read. The drive to read increases when a child achieves desirable, attainable, personal and educational goals. Schubert (1974) says, "When reading provides him with information relating to his interests and gives him answers to questions that concern him, motivating forces are generated" (p. 59).

Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is "the deliberate and purposeful involvement with ideas or concepts" (Lee, Bingham, & Woelfel, 1968, p. vii). It means both determining meaning and evaluating. Judgment-making might involve statements, laws, principles, or hypotheses, arguments, terms, and problems (Drake, 1976). Elements of validity, author bias, and author viewpoint would be considered in judgments about content (Roehler, 1975).

Thinking skills cannot be separated from communication skills. Thinking (comprehending, reasoning, and decision-making) leads to speaking and writing (Baird & Johnson, Note 3). Critical thinking and critical analysis skills can be applied to many kinds of communication messages, whatever the medium: television, tapes, conversations, radio, books, newspapers, and magazines (Lucroy & Caulfield, Note 1).

Basic thinking skills are developed through situations requiring evaluating, generalizing, and predicting. Thinking, understanding, and communicating are built on concrete experience and language facility in a developmental process. "Continuing spiral-like interaction between the individual and his experiences develops increasing competence in communication" (Lee, Bingham, & Woelfel, 1968, p. 15).

In reference to reading, the comprehension skills are the thinking skills by which written language is converted into associated meanings. "The learner must be able, to some degree, to understand written language—to construct a message from print which substantially matches that of the writer" (Smith, Goodman, & Meredith, 1976, p. 286). Guszak (1972) divides comprehension into five skill areas: predicting/extending, locating information, remembering, organizing, and evaluating critically.

Some authorities compare comprehension to the problem-solving approach of other disciplines. The crucial step is defining the problem or setting the purpose. Children must learn to declare their own purposes (Stauffer, 1975). Socrates said, "A good question is half the answer." As the reader sets his/her purpose, a course is charted and reading becomes "a means of exploring, searching, experiencing, and interacting with the reader actively searching for answers to his problems" (Stauffer, 1975, p. 370).

We are still talking about reading in this "Critical Thinking" section because I see a wide overlap in these two areas. Some people do not, perhaps over confusion of the meaning of the word *comprehension*. Comprehension is just one of the six generally recognized levels of cognitive (thinking) skills: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. But to reading specialists, the word *comprehension* can refer to any one or all of these thinking skills.

The interrelatedness of reading comprehension and thinking skills

is described in publications by Stauffer (1975), Goldbecker (1975), and Henry (1974), as follows. Stauffer (1975) believes that children should be taught to examine, hypothesize, find proof, suspend judgment, and make decisions. This can be accomplished by what he calls:

DIRECTED READING-THINKING ACTIVITY

PUPIL ACTIONS

1. Predict: set purposes
2. Read: process ideas
3. Prove: test answers

TEACHER ACTIONS

1. What do you think? Activate thought
2. Why do you think it? Agitate thought
3. Prove it! Require evidence (p. 37)

Goldbecker (1975) says that the two basic modes of thinking involved in the reading process are analysis and synthesis. The strategies inherent in either analysis or synthesis are the same from first grade through college, so Henry (1974) suggests a year-by-year refinemont and developmental mastery or control of these basic logical processes.

Analysis of a single work, breaking it into passages or parts, is the most prevalent form today of teaching reading for appreciation and comprehension. Henry (1974) believes that analysis is overused and that synthesis should be emphasized in the reading process. Synthesis is discovery of the relation of things that seem to exist separately. Synthesizing may mean writing a sentence of one's own, or writing a paragraph, or doing a certain type of reading. For instance, if a child reads three different stories and we ask, "What do they mean as a total experience?", or "How could we put them all together?", we are asking for synthesis. Henry (1974) says:

> Much pre-analysis is necessary before synthesis can take place, but the outcome, the product, the decision, the plan, the attitude, the meaning that the pupil invents—each of these is a set of relations, a structure that the pupil puts together. All are modes of synthesis. (p. 8)

Reading as concept development uses synthesis in two ways: the discovery of relation and the invention of structure. To create a concept, one must discover relations and how they are connected; this strategy of synthesis involves imagination, interpretation, and meaning. Students may be taught the following operations necessary for conceptualization:

1. joining: uniting, coordinating, bringing together, classifying (and, moreover, furthermore)
2. excluding: separating, contrasting, negating, rejecting (not, this . . . not that, neither . . . nor)
3. selecting: omitting, one or the other or both (some, part, few, either . . . or)

4. implying: involving, predicting, causing, result (if . . . then) (Henry, 1974, p. 14-15).

The Essential Learning Skills Television Project could make a major contribution to the education of intermediate grade children by providing instruction in the process of synthesis. Teachers who are limited to dealing with one situation or one textbook find it difficult to gather the resources and provide the examples necessary to teach children how to synthesize. The medium of television is well suited to this task since it has the capacity to overcome time and place limitations and to present numerous examples of the steps involved in synthesis and concept development. The classroom teacher will be called upon to help children reinforce what they have learned through practice and experimentation. But this should not be difficult if the steps in the process of synthesis have been well defined, explained, and demonstrated in the television programs and related materials.

Study Skills

Study is defined as gaining knowledge of a subject by one's own efforts. All of today's overwhelming accumulation of knowledge cannot be taught; if we teach only facts, they change. We must teach students to learn independently—to locate, organize, and use content material.

Children need to learn how to use the library, a dictionary, and reference materials, and to read maps, charts, graphs, and tables (Snoddy, 1974). Walker (1975) suggests that students should learn the SQ3R Study Method: Survey, Question, Read, Recite, and Review. He believes that the study skills include not only study mechanics, but also morale and self-confidence, scholarly drive and values, and planning to get the work done. Three out of four of Walker's components have to do with self-direction, so motivation is extremely important.

The study skills need to be functional, not taught in isolation. A research assignment or report is a good approach to the study skills. Haider (1975) tells students to select a specific topic, find everything possible about it from a variety of sources, take notes, then organize and present findings in an interesting and convincing way. In deciding on a topic, the student should consider personal interest, audience interest, availability of materials, and method of presentation.

In the instructional television series, study skills could be related to children's research in school-related areas such as science and social studies, and in personal-interest areas such as scouts, 4-H, sports, and community activities. Skills needed in the research process should be presented (deciding on a topic, raising questions, locating information, using reference materials, taking notes, interviewing, weighing evidence, organizing material in an outline, writing a report). Presentation methods other than written reports

should be included: graphics, models, slides, experiments, tapes, films, dramas, music, and dioramas. Different forms of presentation add interest for children engaged in research and provide them with opportunities for creative expression.

Research activities will help children know what they want to find out, how to find out, how long the process will take, and how to present their findings. Children are naturally curious; research and study skills in The Essential Learning Skills Television Project can help them become independent learners.

Writing

Through writing, our culture has accumulated the experience of the past (Barnett, 1964). Writing is an essential, rather complex, mental and psychomotor communication skill that requires a certain readiness and maturity. Instruction and practice begin in the primary grades, but it is in the intermediate grades that children develop, expand, and flourish in their composition activities, within an appropriate classroom climate.

It has been said that "learning to write is learning to think"; writing certainly reveals thinking (Iris & Sidney Tiedt, 1967). Writing should be an individual, idea-centered activity involving imaginative thinking and self-expression of ideas and feelings. It is the thought that counts and communicating that thought to others. One goal of writing is interested readers (Pooley, 1975). Writing requires involvement—something to say, plus the knowledge and desire to say it, in writing. Many have tried to describe the writing process. Simmons, Shafer, and West (1976) list these steps: invention, arrangement, development of style, revision. Others suggest prewriting, writing, and rewriting.

We ask children to write for many purposes: to inform, describe, and record; to communicate ideas; to persuade, entertain, and share experiences; to help understand themselves and the world in which they live. What about a classroom climate for writing? Needed is a nonthreatening, but challenging, atmosphere with mutual trust, respect, and acceptance on the part of the teacher and students. There should be a sense of freedom and ease, with encouragement of divergent thought, imagination, questioning, and experimentation.

All of the pride, joy, and satisfaction that composition brings to children can be destroyed with the teacher's red pencil. How mortifying to see one's creation—story, poem, or report—destroyed with those blood-red corrections! Does this mean that teachers should never attempt to correct children's errors? Of course not—just don't do it on their papers. When a child makes recurring errors, the teacher can plan skill lessons in that area: punctuation, capitalization, whatever. When children learn that they can express thoughts and feelings in writing and share them with others, they want to do their very best. They want to be understood by the audience, those who will

read their writing. This self-motivation for learning the mechanics of writing is superior to any correcting or grading system.

Nothing teaches writing better than the writing process itself. Children learn to write by writing. Iris and Sidney Tiedt (1967) state:

> Mere knowledge of terminology or ability to classify English words does not improve composition skills, but moving beyond the basic information to manipulation of words, phrases, clauses, that is, to composing, does improve ability to write. (p. 23)

Wanting to write is the key to learning how to write. The instructional television series can save valuable teacher time by providing motivational segments that will give viewers a common background of experience and that will inspire them to write during and after the programs. The film camera can open up the world for children, taking them into places and situations that would otherwise be unavailable to them. I hope the television programs will portray places and events that will make children feel they just have to write about what they've seen.

The television programs should ideally show children involved in writing activities, because modeling situations—kids to kids—seem to work especially well with writing. "Zebra Wings," a creative writing series produced by the Mississippi Authority for Educational Television, has received hundreds of letters from fifth and sixth graders saying, for example, "Here's my poem; I tried to write it just like the one that Suzy (or Jimmy) read on the show," or "I like 'Zebra Wings' because it's neat to see other kids my age getting to give their opinions in the editorials and letters to the editor that they write."

Children's writing activities can be visualized in a number of ways. We could see the members of a writers' club discussing and analyzing an essay; watch a group read and choose stories and poems for a class literary magazine; follow a girl as she walks through the woods then sits down to write her observations in a journal; see a class talk about and then write thank-you letters to a scientist who visited and talked to the class; observe a newspaper staff in action—planning an issue, covering events, taking notes, typing a story, revising, making a layout, duplicating copies, and distributing the papers in the school or neighborhood. Other kinds of writing that might be described and presented include speeches, song lyrics, riddles, poems, articles, explanations, experiences, opinions, friendly letters, invitations, plays, diaries, jokes, book or movie reviews, research papers, advertisements, autobiographies, TV scripts, haiku, comic strips and cartoons, myths, and fables.

Children will *want* to proofread and revise their compositions if they are writing for an audience. I hope the television programs encourage the publication of children's writing; that means everything from reading it aloud, posting it on the bulletin board, and duplicat-

ing it for the class, to printing it in the school newspaper or literary magazine.

The next two sections of this paper concern language arts areas that are often considered parts of the writing process.

Grammar and Linguistics

Grammar is a set of statements about patterns and processes of the language system. Webster defines grammar as the study of the classes of words, their inflections, and their functions and relations in the sentence. Why study grammar? Iris and Sidney Tiedt (1967) believe that it leads to a better understanding of English sentences and of how language works.

Should there be a formal study of grammar in the elementary school? Most authorities say no. Moffett (1973) is opposed to teaching grammar or linguistics in the elementary school because of the uncertainty about how to teach them and because "we too readily drag down university disciplines into elementary and secondary school" (p. 15). Lefevre (1970) would save grammar for the secondary school. And he says, "Little evidence supports the belief that formal instruction in grammar directly improves ability to read and write; there is in fact evidence to the contrary" (p. 71). Smith, Goodman, and Meredith (1976) recommend a year's intensive study in junior high rather than several years in elementary school. They say, "The primary emphasis in the school program is on expanding the language of learners to better serve their communication needs" (p. 192).

Some educators equate grammar teaching with improvements in speech and usage. Pooley (1975) disagrees, saying that children learn speech in the home and neighborhood. Changes come about by providing contexts where new habits may flourish. "The teaching of grammatical forms will contribute essentially nothing to a change in habits of speech" (p. 180).

Many of the reasons for delaying formal grammar instruction apply also to delaying the study of linguistics. Linguistics is the scientific study of language, the manner in which language functions. Linguistics deals with intonation, basic sentence patterns, word classes and functions, and inflectional word changes.

I would hesitate to recommend the teaching of grammar or linguistics in The Essential Learning Skills Television Project. The subject of grammar is in a state of flux with at least five different approaches being used in schools today: traditional, historical, descriptive, structural, and generative/transformational. I would rather see the television series concentrate on communication as a producing and receiving process, with children given many opportunities to expand their producing and receiving capabilities, instead of attempting to teach a set of rules or systems for a formal study of grammar

or linguistics. Such studies are better left to the junior high or high school.

Writing Mechanics

I classify handwriting, punctuation, and spelling as writing mechanics. Each area includes important skills that the school needs to address. But I question the belief that teaching these skills as separate subjects, as is now done, will result in a transfer of training and make children better writers. Smith, Goodman, and Meredith (1976) state: "Skills will develop if the teacher stimulates the learners to write frequently and confidently, but neither skills nor effective writing will develop if the focus is on isolated skills" (p. 243). Lefevre (1970) says it more strongly: "English teachers should rid themselves of the sadistic mania for 'correctness' in spelling, handwriting, and writing mechanics" (p. 21).

Teachers should view handwriting as a means, not an end, to effective communication. The goal should be legibility. This attitude is important because children vary in their coordination abilities.

Punctuation is overemphasized in composition; it is only functional. Punctuation should be presented not as a set of rules but as a set of signals to help readers "hear" the flow of words as a speaker would say them. Becoming attentive to oral language—the voice qualities of stress, pitch, and juncture—helps children understand the whys and wherefores of the graphic symbols of punctuation.

The aim of a developmental spelling program should be movement toward self-correction and self-diagnosis. Spelling instruction should facilitate communication of written thought, not limit it. According to Smith, Goodman, and Meredith (1976):

> The greatest contribution to progress toward adult spelling norms comes from writing. As youngsters use a wider and wider range of vocabulary in their writing, their spelling continually improves. But if teachers insist pupils must spell every word correctly, they discourage risk taking. The pupils use only those words they are sure they can spell correctly. Consequently, both their writing and their spelling suffer. (p. 249)

In the instructional television series, I would suggest omitting writing mechanics, except through indirect instruction (such as the boy who proudly stands up to read his great mystery story and then can't read his own writing, or the girl who has her article rejected by the school newspaper because of the misspellings and punctuation errors). These subtle messages will have a stronger influence on viewers than direct demands for perfect spelling, punctuation, and handwriting. The motivation has to be there before growth takes place.

Viewing and Presenting

Viewing has only recently been recognized as a language arts/communication skill. Pictures, signs, colors, and shapes stimulate com-

munication in the young child; in today's world films and television have a profound influence on the older child and adult. Visuals have a profound impact on human beings. You can be rather detached as you read or hear about a forest fire or an automobile accident. But when you see one of them—what a difference in involvement!

Visual literacy can and must be taught. Children need to have purposes for viewing, whether it be a movie, still picture, television program, or an event. Establishing purposes, looking for *something*, helps bring about comprehension and interpretation. As in the other communication areas, it is the message or meaning that counts. In the instructional television series purposeful viewing can be enhanced if a narrator occasionally says, "In this segment watch for . . .," or "As you watch, see if you can determine. . . ." All viewing activities should help refine children's abilities to perceive and respond to a visual world.

This paper has emphasized two means of presenting communications, speaking and writing, because we are suggesting that The Essential Learning Skills Television Project deal primarily with language. We should remember, though, that there are many other avenues for presenting: film, models, charts, and other graphics, music, dance, drama, and art. These modes used in the television programs will not only broaden the experiences of children, but can also accelerate language development, and spark creativity and imagination.

Education Today

Education today is at a crossroads. We have mentioned the decline in test scores and the charges that the schools are not doing their job. Educators have been quick to respond with rebuttals such as:

1. Standardized tests do not measure what we are teaching or should be teaching.
2. To demand certain standards of all students is wrong and goes against the grain of a humanistic and individualized approach to teaching. Some of the professional literature goes a step further and suggest that we do away with *all* standards and expectations for achievement; otherwise, we might destroy a child's self-concept and self-image.

I would argue with both of these rationalizations. I recognize that the schools are teaching some very important things to children that could never be measured on a written test. However, most of the skills that are measured by the tests (reading and writing) are still essential skills and must be addressed by the schools. Children need to be prepared for adult life. Success in our society, in terms of work and personal life, is dependent on competence in the areas of reading and writing, as well as on the other communication processes.

Now as to standards. I agree that we cannot set the same standards for all pupils. Children vary in their abilities and potentials because

of hereditary and environmental factors and limitations which the schools cannot control. But, we *can* and *must* set standards and goals, and help children set standards and goals for themselves on an individual basis. Improvement and expansion of communication skills is possible; there is always a next step for every child in all skills (Lucroy & Caulfield, Note 1).

I strongly endorse the self-fulfilling prophecy principle: if you expect little or nothing from students, that is all you will get. On the other hand, if you believe that all childen have potential and the capacity for greater proficiency, if you communicate that message to them and then show them the way, support all efforts, and give them a multitude of opportunities to learn and progress and succeed, the results are fantastic! This is true self-concept building and humanistic education. The Essential Learning Skills Television Project can help.

Conclusion

This paper has presented a discussion of the teaching methods and content usually taught at the fifth- and sixth-grade levels in the communication/language arts areas. Additionally, some specific suggestions have been made about presenting some of this content in an instructional television series.

I will close with a few general recommendations for The Essential Learning Skills Television Project:

1. The television series cannot teach it all. The goal should not be to replace the classroom teacher, but to help her by providing an additional resource for teaching some essential skills to children. "Overkill" should be avoided. We want to do so much for children, teach them so much content, expose them to so many ideas, that we try to do too much. I have seen several potentially good ideas for television series fail, simply because of a content overload. I do not want this to happen to The Essential Learning Skills Television Project, and that is why I have suggested narrowing the content in several of the communication/language arts areas.
2. There should be recognizable goals, stated in the teacher's materials, for each program.
3. The television programs should be a motivating tool; we want children to want to be better communicators. Programs could motivate children by giving them interesting, challenging things to do and by helping them build positive self-concepts, set realistic goals, and create self-instructional attitudes of achievement and persistence.
4. We need programs that invite participation by the viewers during the lessons and afterwards. Children learn by listening or reading or seeing, but perhaps best of all by doing. Make them want to *do* something!
5. In our information-rich society we need to develop independent learners. We don't have to fill children with informa-

tion; rather we should be teaching them how to find the information, assimilate it, use it, think about it, enjoy it, judge it, and communicate it to others.

I see an exciting potential for education as children and instructional television are brought together in The Essential Learning Skills Television Project.

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Coping in the 1980's: Inquiry Skills and Participation in Decision-Making for Fifth and Sixth Graders, by Byron G. Massialas, Professor of Education, Florida State University.

Teaching Mathematics: An Integration of Skill and Knowledge, by Philip Peak, Professor of Education, Indiana University.

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